

JANUARY 3, 1978

ASWAN

INTRO:

PRESIDENT CARTER AND EGYPT'S PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT ARE DUE TO MEET WEDNESDAY MORNING IN ASWAN, CAPITAL OF EGYPT'S SOUTHERNMOST PROVINCE AND THE SITE OF THE FAMED HIGH DAM. VOA'S DOUGLAS ROBERTS SENT THIS REPORT ON ASWAN AND ITS HISTORY.

TEXT:

ONCE A GATEWAY TO BLACK AFRICA AND A FRONTIER OUTPOST, ASWAN IS NOW AN INDUSTRIAL CENTER OF SOME TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND RESIDENTS. AND NEARBY IS THE SAAD AL AALI, THE HIGH DAM, FAR MORE AWESOME THAN ANY OF THIS COUNTRY'S FABLED PYRAMIDS. THE NILE DELTA IS ONLY ABOUT TEN KILOMETERS WIDE AROUND ASWAN, A NARROW STRIP OF GREEN ON EITHER SIDE OF THE RIVER WITH DESERT WASTE LAND BEYOND.

ON AN ISLAND AT MIDSTREAM ARE THE RUINS OF THE OLDEST PART OF THE CITY, DATING BACK TO THE DAYS OF PHARAOHS. (OPT) THE ISLAND WAS CALLED YEBU, WHICH MEANS LANDS OF THE ELEPHANTS. BUT IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER IT GOT ITS NAME BECAUSE OF ITS SHAPE OR BECAUSE OF THE IVORY TUSKS THAT REACHED THERE ALONG THE DESERT TRADE ROUTES FROM THE SOUTH. LATER, THE CITY WAS CALLED SUNU OR SYRENE; BOTH NAMES ARE DERIVED FROM THE QUARTZ-LADEN GRANITE THAT WAS QUARRIED THERE IN ANCIENT TIMES FOR USE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF MANY OF PHARAONIC MONUMENTS OF EGYPT. (END OPT) ASWAN WAS THE SOUTHERNMOST LINE OF DEFENSE FOR THE PHARAOHS AND FOR THE GREEKS AND THE ROMANS WHO CAME AFTERWARDS. IT WAS ALSO A MAJOR TRADING POST FOR THE IVORY, OSTRICH FEATHERS, SKINS AND THE JUICY FRUIT OF THE TAMARIND TREE BROUGHT UP FROM BLACK AFRICA.

(OPT) IN THE SECOND CENTURY BEFORE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST, A GREEK SCHOLAR NAMED ERATOSTHENES TOOK NOTE OF AN UNUSUAL PHENOMENON IN WHAT IS NOW ASWAN. AT MID-DAY IN THE BLAZING HEAT OF SUMMER, HE SAW THAT THE SUN'S RAYS SHONE PERPENDICULARLY INTO

A WELL WITHOUT CASTING A SHADOW. HE MADE USE OF THE FACTOR TO CALCULATE WITH CONSIDERABLE ACCURACY THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF THE EARTH. (END OPT)

HISTORIANS SAY ASWAN WAS PROSPEROUS IN THE MIDDLE AGES. BUT THE CITY WAS FREQUENTLY ATTACKED BY MARAUDING BANDS OF DESERT TRIBESMEN. THIS WAS PUT TO A HALT IN THE EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY WHEN EGYPT'S OTTOMAN RULER ESTABLISHED THE FIRST PERMANENT MILITARY GARRISON IN THE CITY. MORE THAN FOUR HUNDRED YEARS LATER, IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY, ASWAN WAS AGAIN A GARRISON TOWN AND BRITISH LORD KITCHENER'S HEADQUARTERS IN THE DAYS BEFORE HE LED THE ANGLO-EGYPTIAN FORCES THAT CRUSHED THE REVOLT OF THE MAHDI AND HIS FOLLOWERS IN NEIGHBORING SUDAN. IN ASWAN TODAY, THERE IS A STATUE OF ONE OF THE ANCIENT PHARAOHS CALLED AMHOTEP. HE BUILT THE WALL AROUND A RIVER-FED LAKE NORTH OF ASWAN TO STORE WATER FOR IRRIGATION. HE WAS PERHAPS THE FIRST EGYPTIAN TO BE STRUCK BY WHAT ONE SCHOLAR CALLED AN OBSESSION TO MAKE MAXIMUM USE OF THE NILE LIFE-GIVING WATERS. (OPT) IT WAS UNDER THE BRITISH ADMINISTRATION OF EGYPT THAT THE FIRST ASWAN DAM WAS BUILT. ON ITS COMPLETION IN 1902, IT WAS CONSIDERED A MARVEL OF MODERN CONSTRUCTION WORK, BUT IT IS ALMOST DWARFED BY ITS SUCCESSOR BUILT MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY LATER. (END OPT)

THE POLITICS OF THE COLD WAR, THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT AND THE SUEZ CRISIS OF NINETEEN FIFTY-SIX WERE ALL IN SOME WAY LINKED TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HIGH DAM. IT CAME TO BE KNOWN AS THE ECONOMIC CORNERSTONE OF THE NEW EGYPT ENVISAGED BY THE LATE PRESIDENT NASSER. WORK ON THE HIGH DAM BEGAN IN NINETEEN SIXTY UNDER SOVIET SUPERVISION. IT TOOK A DECADE TO COMPLETE AND IT WAS INAUGURATED WITH CONSIDERABLE FANFARE IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-ONE BY PRESIDENT SADAT. IT IS THREE THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED METERS WIDE,

NINE HUNDRED AND EIGHT METERS THICK AT ITS BASE AND MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED AND TEN METERS HIGH. THE HUGE RESERVOIR CREATED BY THE DAM, CALLED LAKE NASSER, STRETCHES FOR HUNDREDS OF KILOMETERS TO THE SOUTH. BECAUSE OF IT, THOUSANDS OF NUBIANS HAD TO BE RESETTLED AND THERE WAS A MAJOR WORLD CAMPAIGN TO DISMANTLE AND MOVE MANY OF THE ANCIENT TEMPLES AND MONUMENTS FROM AN AREA NOW TOTALLY SUBMERGED BY THE LAKE WATERS. FOR YEARS, EXPERTS HAVE ARGUED ABOUT THE RELATIVE BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE HIGH DAM. IT HAS GREATLY INCREASED THE AMOUNT OF CULTIVABLE LAND IN THE REGION, DOUBLES THIS COUNTRY'S ELECTRIC POWER OUTPUT AND SHARPLY REDUCED THE THREAT OF FLOOD DISASTERS. BUT THE HIGH DAM ALSO HOLDS BACK THE SILT BROUGHT DOWN THE NILE THAT USED TO ENRICH THE DELTA'S SOIL, AND NOW EGYPTIAN FARMERS ARE OBLIGED TO USE FERTILIZERS INSTEAD. THE PROS AND CONS OF THE DAM HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECT OF COUNTLESS BOOKS AND ARTICLES. BUT FOR MOST EGYPTIANS, THE DAM IS A SOURCE OF CONSIDERABLE NATIONAL PRIDE.

(OPT) IN THE DAYS BEFORE THE DAM WAS BUILT, ASWAN WAS RENOWNED AS A WINTER HEALTH RESORT BECAUSE OF ITS WARM DRY CLIMATE. THE AGA KHAN WAS A FREQUENT VISITOR AND WHEN HE DIED IN NINETEEN FIFTY-SEVEN, HE WAS LAID TO REST IN ASWAN IN AN ORNATE MUSOLEUM THAT IS AN ALMOST EXACT REPLICA OF THE TOMB OF ONE OF EGYPT'S MEDIEVAL RULERS (END OPT)

TODAY, EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS LIKE TO STRESS ASWAN'S IMPORTANCE OF A GROWING INDUSTRIAL CENTER WITH AN IRON FOUNDRY AND A FERTILIZER PLANT AMONG OTHERS. BUT WITH PHARAOHNIC GREEKS, ROMAN AND COPTIC CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS, THE ASWAN REGION REMAINS A MAJOR TOURIST ATTRACTION. AND FOR ORDINARY EGYPTIANS, THE CITY IS KNOWN FOR ITS STEAKS AND FOR THIS COUNTRY'S FINEST PEANUTS, A FACT THAT IS NOT LIKELY TO ESCAPE THE NOTICE OF PRESIDENT CARTER.